



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ART AND PROGRESS

VOLUME VII

DECEMBER 1915

NUMBER 2

THE VALUE OF ART TO A NATION*

BY HON. HENRY WHITE

Former American Ambassador to Italy and France

IT is with considerable hesitation that I have ventured to accept the kind invitation of the authorities of the American Federation of Arts to make this address. Not that I have any doubt in my mind as to the value—the inestimable value and importance—of art to a nation, and especially to these United States of ours; but I am in no sense an expert in matters artistic, and while I am, and always have been, an enthusiastic admirer of what is beautiful, both in nature and in art, I cannot but feel that it is somewhat presumptuous on my part to speak to an august assemblage, such as this, on a subject respecting which they know so much more than I do.

It is a very far-reaching subject which can be treated from many points of view, and the more one looks into it, the more numerous and interesting do those points of view appear to be. As, however, there is but a limited amount of time in which I can occupy your attention, I shall assume that there is no one present here today who is not of the opinion that the appreciation and cultivation of art have been of the highest importance and value in the development of those nations which have successively played a leading part in history, and I shall dwell rather upon its value for the enhancement of life in a democracy such as ours.

There can be little doubt, I think, that the interest which we have been inspiring as a World Power during the last quarter of a century, or thereabouts, has increased in proportion to the development of culture among our people. Art and culture go

*An address delivered at the Sixth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Arts held in Washington on May 12th, 13th and 14th, 1915.

hand, in hand, and the most highly cultivated nations of the world have been, with perhaps an exception or two, the most artistic. I don't know that I should be quite justified in claiming for this country the foremost position, as yet, in either of those categories, but I feel confident that its attainment thereof is more than probable at no distant day, if the public interest in art and culture maintains the ratio of development with which it has progressed since the great Exposition at Chicago in 1893.

As a result of the exquisite beauty of the architectural and other artistic effects produced on that occasion by a number of eminent and enthusiastic American artists who had been trained in France and Italy and Greece, with Charles F. McKim, Daniel H. Burnham, Augustus St.-Gaudens, Frederic Law Olmstead and Frank Millet at their head; effects, the like of which I have never seen and never expect to see again in any country, this nation first realized the extent and possibilities of its artistic resources and capabilities, particularly in respect to architecture. To say that the seed sown at that Exposition, which will be ever memorable in the history of American Art by those great lovers and professors of art, who are now—alas—no longer with us, and by the artists associated with them, has since borne fruit a thousand fold, is to my mind but a feeble description of the benefit which they conferred upon their country. Foremost among those benefits is undoubtedly the diminution which they were the means of initiating and which has been extending itself ever since, of the idea, until then

almost universally prevalent—among the masses—or among such of them as ever gave the matter any thought at all—that the enjoyment and still more the profession of art can only be the possession of a chosen few endowed with special talent or with large fortunes; that there is consequently something about the love and enjoyment of art which is essentially undemocratic because unattainable by the public at large.

That such a popular misconception should have been dispelled—to a very considerable extent at least—is indeed fortunate, as is the fact that our people should be gradually finding out that, the power to see beauty is by no means an artistic monopoly; that while some men and women are, of course, born with the art feeling, it is capable of being developed more or less in every one; that its value is inestimable as a factor in public education; that the difference between artists and other people is that the former possess not only the power, which is available to anybody, of seeing beauty, but the skill to express it in some material form; and that art, instead of being a luxury for the sole enjoyment of those possessed of wealth, is of the greatest benefit to humanity.

Victor Hugo has written “that the beautiful is as useful as the useful, more so perhaps”; Keats, in his ode on a Grecian urn, says: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”; and according to the poet Schiller, “Nature has formed creatures only. Art has made men.”

There is scarcely any material, however simple and insignificant, which cannot be made a vehicle of artistic feeling, and the construction and decoration of the humblest cottage may be carried out with art feeling.

The art-idea, to my mind, is a sense of pleasure and of expansion in what would otherwise be the sternness and grimness of ordinary life; it elevates the thoughts to a higher plane; it creates a broader and more lenient spirit in respect to the views and actions of one's fellow creatures and a more human way of looking at things in general. The highest sense of art implies symmetry, order and avoidance of waste;

perhaps also—and more than aught else—restraint. Without restraint on the part of an artist, the production of good art in small things or great is impossible; nothing that is overdone being good art. Art, in fact, is the science and theory of beauty in perception and expression, “the human interpretation of beauty.” If, therefore, art is to be of value to this great nation of ours, the whole community should be brought to interest itself and to make itself as effective in matters of taste as it is in matters economic and political, with a view to securing the assistance of the best expert artistic knowledge in the creation of our public works—particularly buildings and parks—and to stimulating a public interest therein. Such has always been, and still is, the case in France where the humblest inhabitant of towns and of the countryside is apt not only to look at things from the artistic point of view in respect to what is going on in the country generally, but to make use of this feeling in the exterior and interior decoration and arrangement of his surroundings, there being even a right and wrong, an artistic and an inartistic way of arranging pots and pans in kitchens, and bits of furniture, crockery and other odds and ends about a cottage.

I do not wish to be understood as advocating art as the main object of a nation's existence, but rather as an accompaniment to those fundamental virtues—virility, energy, sense of duty and of the necessity of work which, it is a mere platitude to say, are indispensable to the growth and development of a vigorous nation on proper lines. But the possession of all these qualities, unaccompanied by feeling for and appreciation of art in its widest acceptation, is not unlikely to produce a nation which is hard and dry in its thoughts and aspirations, and, consequently incapable of the best enjoyment of life, or of utilizing advantageously the qualities in question.

Such was the case with the people of this country for a considerable period after we became a nation, largely in consequence of the traditions inherited from our Puritan forefathers to whom everything that was pleasant and beautiful in life, and indeed almost any conceivable



AMOR CARITAS BY AUGUSTUS SAINT-GAUDENS

RECENTLY ACQUIRED BY

THE DETROIT MUSEUM OF ART



CROSSLIGHTS

WILLIAM SERGEANT KENDALL

RECENTLY ACQUIRED BY

THE DETROIT MUSEUM OF ART

form of enjoyment, however innocent, was a grievous sin.

Fond as I was of the home of my youth, and happy as I was there, I nevertheless remember feeling as I emerged from childhood, how uninteresting our cities and country districts were, in those now distant days, and how necessary it was, if one felt a need for mental development, to go abroad from time to time. Well, for my own part, I can only say now that it would be impossible to imagine a more complete change of feeling than I have experienced in that respect—a feeling which began at the Chicago Exposition and has been growing ever since.

I now consider—and I am sure there must be compatriots innumerable who are of the same opinion, that this is getting rapidly to be by far the most interesting country in the world to live in. I do not find the days long enough to tap even superficially what is to be found in this capital city of ours alone in respect to art, science and culture, in respect both to work already accomplished, and to aspirations for the future; to say nothing of what is to be found in the same line in so many of our other cities. To such an extent is this the case that were it not for a near family tie and old and dear friendships in Europe, I do not think that I should care to go abroad again during the remainder of my life.

From being an uninteresting, this has become an exceedingly interesting country from the intellectual and artistic point of view, and I attribute this great change largely to the fact that our people, who in the earlier years of our existence as a nation were too busy in developing their material resources to be able to think of anything else, have of late years, and especially since the Chicago Exposition, begun to think artistically.

There never has been such a favorable—such a colossal opportunity since the dawn of History for the cultivation and practice of artistic taste by a nation as there is now, and as there will be for many years to come in this country.

Not only have we cities innumerable to improve and to render beautiful, with many more doubtless still to come into existence and a country highly favored

by nature and by climate, but we have also a population capable of producing great artists and of appreciating their work, together with an abundant supply of the wherewithal which is not likely to diminish as time goes on, to promote the creation of beautiful buildings, landscape gardening, and other works of art.

I do not recall any such felicitous combination of circumstances in the past for the development, by actual experience, of the art-idea and for the enjoyment of its results by the people of a great nation. But, for that very reason, and because the opportunities in that line are so infinitely far-reaching, the importance of the general diffusion of an art education, especially among the children of all classes, cannot be overestimated. Unfortunately, every artistic activity is not art, as we know to our cost; and a higher education in art for all the people would not only preserve us from the production of inartistic monstrosities made by man, but would also insure the preservation of the beautiful spots which nature has lavished upon us from desecration for commercial or other purposes, such as, for instance, Niagara Falls.

All that we have created in the way of beautiful buildings—and other works of art—is due to artistic knowledge, a lack of which is responsible for whatever is ugly and offensive to good taste and to a proper sense of beauty. We have examples of both in this city, but fortunately, owing to the provision by our Government of a Fine Arts Commission, without whose approval no public building or park or monument can now be erected here, we are likely to be spared any further additions to the sculptural and other inartistic horrors of the period succeeding the Civil War, some of which still unfortunately desecrate the city.

To mention only one example of what can be accomplished in the way of turning an ugly and useless spot into a beautiful and useful place of recreation, I would mention the Potomac Park, here in Washington. A few years ago it was a hideous swamp. Those who frequent it now in such large numbers in pursuit of fresh air and recreation, can see for themselves not only what has already been made of it,

but how beautiful a place of public resort it is likely to be a few years hence, when the Lincoln Monument shall have been completed and the plans for laying out the roads, and paths—and particularly when the shrubbery and tree effects shall have been carried out. No one will deny, I imagine, that it is far more agreeable and elevating to the mind to play golf or lawn tennis, or polo; to ride on horseback or to drive; to swim or to row and sail boats; and to do anything, or even nothing, amid beautiful, rather than amid squalid surroundings, and the Potomac Park is only one among instances innumerable in this country where pleasing results have been similarly effected for the enjoyment of the people, by those possessing artistic knowledge and training.

Following the example of what has been done in Washington, Municipal Leagues and Civic Improvement Associations are happily being organized in many parts of the country for the beautification of our cities and of the country districts surrounding them. These bodies will contribute materially towards the propagation of a higher appreciation of the artistic, whereby what is unsightly will gradually diminish and tend to disappear, such as unworthy public buildings, bill boards, rows of unsightly houses, and much else which could just as well be made sightly and pleasing, or at least inoffensive to the eye, with little or no additional cost.

It is to be hoped that before long laws may be enacted in many of our States, whereby these results may be attained; but what would contribute more to that end than anything that I can think of would be the establishment of a Department of Art in the National Government, such as exists in France, Italy, and other countries of the world, with a member of the Cabinet at its head, or at least of a Bureau attached to one of the Departments already existing and I venture to hope that the influence of members of the American Federation of will be Arts vigorously directed towards the establishment of such a Department or Bureau.

I have so far only alluded to the value to a nation of an intelligent knowledge and appreciation of the Fine Arts from the

point of view of broadening its intellectual activity and of largely increasing its capacity for the enjoyment of life.

But there is also the practical and commercial point of view which must not be forgotten.

Quite apart from the fact that the greater the number of capable trained workers in the industrial arts the greater will be the capacity of our manufacturers to compete with those of other countries, which, of course, means an increase of their revenues, there can be no doubt that the possession of beautiful buildings and parks, and of other artistic attractions as a direct source of profit because visitors are thereby attracted in constantly increasing numbers and, in the aggregate, leave behind them a very considerable amount of money. This is exemplified in Washington by the large number of tourists who may be seen every day in huge motor cars, visiting the beautiful buildings and other objects of artistic interest, and I must say that I never meet one of these large parties without a feeling of real satisfaction at the thought that the artistic sense of so many more of my compatriots is being made keener and more appreciative, and their enjoyment of life thereby largely increased.

The admirable efforts of the American Federation of Arts towards the diffusion of art education among our people by means of travelling exhibitions, lectures, and in so many other ways, especially by these annual conventions in Washington which tend to focus the attention of the country at large upon the subject, cannot be too highly commended and supported.

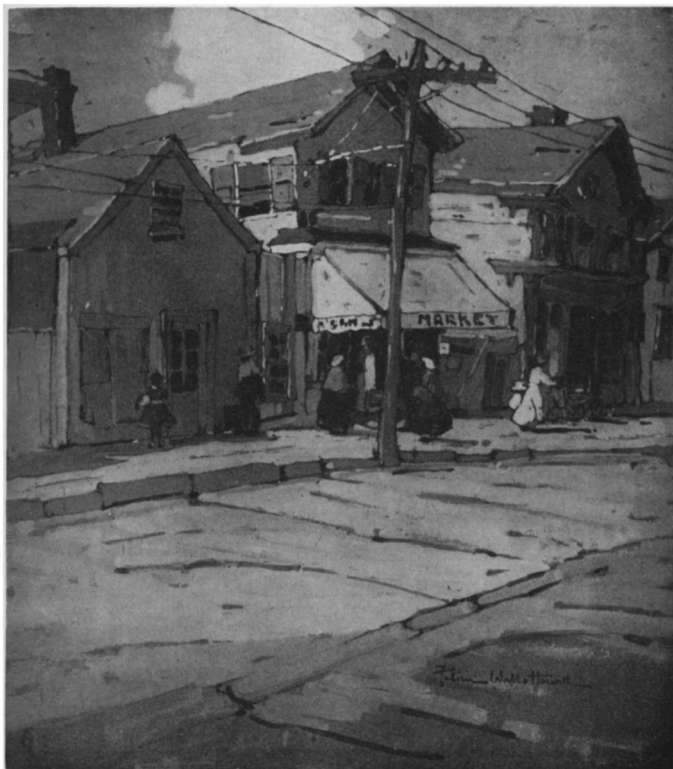
A paper entitled "Statistical Survey of Art Education in the Country"—particularly of professional training in art—issued by the Federation, is a very interesting document and should be widely read, as I hope it will be. Copies being at the disposal of every one here today, I shall not make any detailed comments upon the valuable and instructive details which it gives, beyond expressing satisfaction at the announcement that classes in industrial art have been recently established by the School Board of the City of New York.

It is unfortunate, in view of the scarcity,

from which our manufacturers are suffering, of trained workers in the industrial arts, that there are no public schools of industrial art as yet in this country, and it is earnestly to be hoped that means may soon be found by the establishment of such schools, to utilize the considerable amount of talent which appears to exist in the public schools throughout the United States for the creation of skilled craftsmen and artistic designers.

On the other hand, it is satisfactory to note that drawing is now taught in the public high schools of every State in the

Union and even in all of the elementary schools, except those of one State, and that the general improvement of taste and interest in art throughout the country is believed to be largely due to the teaching in those schools. I hope this may be true, for there can be no doubt that art is a potent factor in the moral and mental uplift of a nation and that the ultimate result of its diffusion among our people, if unaccompanied by any diminution of the more vigorous qualities to which I have previously alluded, will be the development of a finer race.



A MARKETING—MARTHA'S VINEYARD

FELICIE WALDO HOWELL

SHOWN IN THE 10TH ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF WATER COLORS

THE ART CLUB OF PHILADELPHIA